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AUTHOR Wharton-McDonald, Ruth; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Classroom observations and in-depth interviews were used to study nine first-grade teachers who were nominated by language arts coordinators as being either outstanding or typical in their ability to help students develop the skills of beginning literacy. Based on observational measures of year-end student reading and writing achievement and on ongoing measures of student engagement, three groups of teachers emerged from the original set of nine. Among the three teachers in the highest achievement group, the following cluster of beliefs and practices were found to distinguish their instruction from that of their more typical peers: (1) instructional balance of skills and high-quality reading and writing experiences; (2) a high density of instruction; (3) extensive use of scaffolding; (4) encouragement of student self-regulation; (5) a thorough integration of reading and writing activities; (6) high expectations for all students; (7) masterful classroom management; and (8) an awareness of purpose. Results complemented earlier survey data that highlighted the complexity of primary literacy instruction. These data and the previous survey results provide convergent support for the conclusion that truly outstanding primary-level literacy instruction is a balanced integration of high-quality reading and writing experiences and explicit instruction of basic literacy skills. (Contains 66 references and 3 tables of data. Appendixes present interview protocols, sample questions asked of teachers, and a sample model presented to a teacher during an interview.) (Author/RS)

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Outstanding Literacy Instruction in First Grade: Teacher Practices and Student Achievement

Ruth Wharton-McDonald
Michael Pressley
Jennifer Mistretta-Hampston
State University of New York at Albany

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Winter 1997

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NRRC - University of Georgia
318 Aderhold
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-7125
(706) 542-3674 Fax: (706) 542-3678
INTERNET: NRRC@uga.cc.uga.edu

NRRC - University of Maryland College Park
3216 J. M. Patterson Building
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742
(301) 405-8035 Fax: (301) 314-9625
INTERNET: NRRC@umail.umd.edu

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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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National Reading Research Center
318 Aderhold Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602-7125
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National Reading Research Center
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About the Authors

Ruth Wharton-McDonald is a postdoctoral research associate in the department of Educational Psychology and Statistics at the State University of New York at Albany. She has worked with children experiencing reading difficulties in her capacities as a reading specialist and as a school psychologist. Her research has addressed various aspects of school learning and, in particular, literacy learning. Currently, she is studying effective literacy instruction at the elementary level with the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement

Michael Pressley is a Professor of Educational Psychology and Statistics, State University of New York at Albany, and a principal investigator with the National Reading Research Center. He has published extensively in the areas of reading, memory, and cognition and instruction. His current work is diverse, including studies of exemplary primary-level reading instruction, comprehension strategies instruction, and student use of graphing calculators in postsecondary mathematics.

Jennifer Mistretta-Hampston obtained her doctorate in educational psychology and statistics from the State University of New York at Albany. Her research focuses on the beliefs and practices of parents regarding their children's educational development. Her dissertation focused on parental beliefs about early literacy development. She is currently as assistant professor at Youngstown State University in Ohio.

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Outstanding Literacy Instruction in First Grade: Teacher Practices and Student Achievement

Ruth Wharton-McDonald
Michael Pressley
Jennifer Mistretta-Hampton
State University of New York at Albany

Abstract. *Classroom observations and in-depth interviews were used to study nine first-grade teachers who were nominated by language arts coordinators as being either outstanding or typical in their ability to help students develop the skills of beginning literacy. Based on observational measures of year-end student reading and writing achievement and on ongoing measures of student engagement, three groups of teachers emerged from the original set of nine. Among the three teachers in the highest achievement group, the following cluster of beliefs and practices were found to distinguish their instruction from their more typical peers: (a) instructional balance of skills and high-quality reading and writing experiences, (b) a high density of instruction, (c) extensive use of scaffolding, (d) encouragement of student self-regulation, (e) a thorough integration of reading and writing activities, (f) high expectations for all students, (g) masterful classroom management, and (h) an awareness of purpose. The outcomes reported here complement earlier survey data that highlighted the complexity of primary literacy instruction. These data and the previous survey results provide convergent support for the conclusion that truly outstanding primary-level literacy instruction is a balanced integration of high-quality reading and writing experiences and explicit instruction of basic literacy skills.*

The nature of effective primary literacy instruction has been the topic of heated debate in education for most of this century (Adams, 1990; Balmuth, 1982; Chall, 1983a; Huey, 1908). In part, the task of teaching beginning reading effectively receives so much attention because the failure to develop basic reading abilities during the first few years of school portends a host of later academic, economic, and even social-emotional difficulties (e.g., Athey, 1976, 1982; Dunwant, 1982; Lloyd, 1978; Snider & Tarver, 1987).

As a result of the intense interest in early literacy development, a variety of models and theories have been proposed to explain how children learn to read, with each theory offering its own recommendations for instructional practice (e.g., whole language, sight word, phonics, linguistic approaches). In its current rendition, the debate focuses on the importance of literature and composing versus an emphasis on skills development. At one extreme are the proponents of the whole language model, who

place the reading of fine literature and the composing of meaningful messages at the center of literacy instruction. At the other extreme are those who advocate phonics-first approaches. For discussions of this debate see Adams (1990), Milligan (1988), Nicholson (1992), Smith (1994), Stahl (1992), and Stahl, McKenna, and Pagnucco (1994).

According to whole language advocates, children can acquire the skills of written language as they do oral language. That is, just as oral language develops as a product of children's natural interactions with the linguistic environment, so the skills of literacy will develop naturally if a child is surrounded by an environment rich in print and opportunities to use print in authentic situations, including for example, the composition of meaningful texts (Goodman, 1989; Goodman & Goodman, 1979).

In contrast, the skills-based approach is predicated on a hierarchical model of learning to read in which children must learn to "break the code" of written language (Chall, 1983b; Flesch, 1955; Gough, 1972; Gunning, 1995). According to Chall and others, the ability to read is *not* a defining human trait, as is language. That is, humans have not evolved so that they are neurobiologically prepared to learn to read from mere exposure to print. Typically, humans must be *taught* to read. Advocates of skills-based approaches argue that children require explicit instruction in the subskills of reading—especially decoding—in order to become proficient readers (e.g., Adams, 1990; Chall, 1983b; Henry, 1993).

There exists already a vast literature describing reading development and the various aspects of these approaches (and others) from the perspective of university researchers. In general, the existing literature falls into three broad categories: (1) theoretical models of reading development (e.g., Chall, 1983b; Goodman & Goodman, 1979; Gough, 1972; Roswell & Natchez, 1989); (2) comparative studies of early reading improvement, usually focused on two contrasting approaches (see Stahl & Miller, 1989; Stahl, et al., 1994 for reviews); and (3) testimonials of those favoring a particular perspective (e.g., Shannon, 1994; see Fry, 1993 for a discussion of such testimonials). Theoretical models of reading development typically have been derived from experimental studies of the visual, perceptual, cognitive, and motivational processes involved in learning to read. The focus, thus, has been on student processes, and the role of the teacher in these studies has been minimized. The second group of studies—those comparing instructional approaches—addresses teacher practice, but almost always from the standpoint of general program components as measured by brief, objective, classroom observations. Again, the voices of the teachers—including their personal theories and specific patterns of practice—have been omitted. Finally, instructional testimonials, while presenting the teachers' points of view, typically focus on the benefits of a single aspect of one teacher's classroom practice, such as the use of big books, and do not attempt to present any systematic analysis of other critical aspects of instruction. Thus, despite the breadth of the existing literature on beginning reading, the research contains a disturbing gap: There is a lack of systematic

study of effective teachers, a lack of understanding of their practices and perspectives.

This is a puzzling omission. Research on professional expertise has established that competent professionals are able to provide valid and accurate information about the conscious decisions they make as they do their jobs. Indeed, experts in a profession typically have a privileged understanding of what they do. As such, they are often consulted as the primary source when the goal is to understand expert performances, with observations and interviews used to illuminate their detailed understandings of the tasks they perform (Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988; Diaper, 1989; Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Hoffman, 1992; Meyer & Booker, 1991; Scott, Clayton, & Gibson, 1991).

Because of the potential of excellent teachers to provide insights into the nature of effective primary reading instruction, our group decided to study the beliefs and practices of these teachers. The first effort in that direction was an interview study of a sample of primary-level (K–2) teachers who were nominated by their supervisors as outstanding in promoting the literacy acquisition of their students (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). A national sample of such teachers responded to two surveys. The first consisted of open-ended questions about their literacy instruction with good, average, and weak readers. Teachers were asked to list the ten most important things that they did with each reader type. These responses then were used to generate more than 400 questions in a second questionnaire, on which teachers indicated whether they used a particular practice and/or the extent to what they did. Any practice nominated by even a single teacher on the first questionnaire appeared as a question on the second questionnaire.

The teachers in the Pressley et al. (1996) study reported that they (a) offered qualitatively similar instruction to students of all abilities, (b) developed literate environments in their classrooms, (c) modeled and taught decoding and comprehension skills, (d) required extensive and diverse reading by their students, (e) taught students to plan, draft, and revise as part of writing, (f) did much to motivate their students to read and write, and (g) monitored carefully their students' progress in reading and writing. In short, with only a few exceptions, the teachers reported using both skills instruction and immersion in a literate environment in their literacy programs. This study sensitized us to the possibility that excellent primary level teaching might not reflect either of the extremes in the current debate about literacy instruction. Rather, the teachers in this initial study reported a balance of skills instruction and whole language practices. These reports are consistent with an emerging theme in the language arts education community that balancing whole language and skills instruction has great potential for developing broadly competent readers and writers (Adams, 1990; Cazden, 1992; Delpit, 1986; Duffy, 1991; Fisher & Hiebert, 1990; McCaslin, 1989; McIntyre & Pressley, 1996; Pressley, 1994).

Of course, one limitation of the Pressley et al. (1996) study was that, as a survey, it was conducted at something of a distance from actual teaching. A second problem was that only teachers believed to be very strong in the

Table 1
District Characteristics

	District A	District B	District C	District D
District Type	suburban	suburban	suburban	suburban
% Free/Reduced Lunch	17%	5%	16%	12%
% Minority	1.8%	3.7%	7.9%	1.6%

area of literacy were surveyed, so that the perspectives held by outstanding teachers could not be differentiated from the perspectives of more average teachers. The present study, therefore, took a different approach in which a smaller sample of teachers believed to vary in effectiveness were observed over time and interviewed in depth.

As in Pressley et al. (1996), we identified teachers who were perceived by supervisors as being outstanding in promoting their students' literacy in this investigation. At the same time, we identified a second group of teachers considered to be more average in their effectiveness. Because of the particular focus on first grade in the great debates on beginning reading instruction, grade one instruction was the target of this study. All of the teachers were observed teaching over the latter two-thirds of the school year (December–June). They were also interviewed in depth about their beliefs about teaching, with the interviews being informed by the ongoing observations.

The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of first-grade literacy instruction from the dual (but hopefully converging) perspectives of the researchers and of the teachers themselves. From the outset, we recognized the limitation of being able to study only a small number of teachers as intensely as teachers were studied here. The depth of approach taken here was complemented by the breadth of the earlier survey (Pressley et al., 1996), however. Thus, we believed that any conclusion emerging both in this study and the previous survey would be highly credible, as it would be supported by converging data from studies using very different methodologies. The degree of convergence is one focus of the discussion that concludes this article.

Methods

Participants

Four suburban school districts volunteered to participate in the study. Three described themselves as serving primarily middle- to lower-middle class families; one served primarily upper-middle class families (see Table 1 for the percentages of children receiving free and reduced price lunches in each district). In participating districts, language arts coordinators were asked to nominate one or more teachers in each of two categories. The first category consisted of first-grade teachers who

were considered to be truly exceptional at helping their students achieve literacy. A second category consisted of first-grade teachers who were perceived to be otherwise similar to their outstanding peers and who served similar populations, but who were much more typical or average in promoting student literacy. Importantly, these were not to be weak teachers, but rather teachers who represented typical literacy instruction in the district. One district (District C) nominated two outstanding teachers and one typical teacher. The remaining three districts each nominated one outstanding and one typical teacher.

Specific criteria for nominating outstanding teachers were left up to the nominators. However, coordinators were asked to make as strong a case as possible, using whatever evidence was available that these teachers were truly exceptional. The criteria cited most frequently in this category were (a) observed teacher behaviors (cited for all five of the teachers nominated as outstanding), (b) teacher enthusiasm (cited for all five teachers), (c) students' reading achievement at the end of the year (cited for four of the five teachers), (d) students' writing achievement at the end of the year (cited for four of the five teachers), (e) teacher involvement in improving his or her own practice (cited for four of the five teachers), (f) students' enthusiasm for reading (cited for four of the five teachers), (g) the desire to have their own child (i.e., the supervisor's) placed in these classrooms ("This is the teacher I would want my child to have for first grade.") (cited for four of the five teachers), (h) the teacher's ability to reach students with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds (cited for two of the five teachers), and (i) positive feedback from parents (cited for two of the five teachers). Only one district administered standardized tests in first grade, which accounts for the supervisors' general neglect of test scores during the nomination process.

There was a wide range of teaching experience in the sample of teachers. Among the outstanding teachers, the average (mean) number of years teaching was 8.2 with a range of 2 to 25 years. Among the typical teachers, the average number of years teaching was 12 with an identical range of 2 to 25 years. All five teachers nominated as outstanding were women. Three of the four teachers nominated as typical were women.

Data Collection

In studying a classroom culture, there are generally three types of information that can be studied: what teachers and students do (behavior), what teachers and students say (language), and what teachers and students create (artifacts) (Spradley, 1980). Each of these types of information was recorded throughout this study. The primary means of data collection included classroom observations and teacher interviews. The data consisted of field notes from the observations and discussions with teachers, verbatim transcripts from the ethnographic interviews, sample instructional materials, and representative student work products.

Observations

Approximately twice a month from December to June of the 1994–1995 school year,

researchers observed literacy instruction in each classroom being studied. Observations were timed to coincide with scheduled language arts periods, and typically lasted between one and two hours. Most of the observations were conducted by the first two authors. In addition, the third author conducted a smaller number of observations—at least one in each classroom. Most of the observations were consistent with what Spradley (1980) terms *passive participation* or what Wolcott (1988) refers to as *privileged observer* status. That is, in most instances, the observer sat in an unobtrusive spot in the classroom during periods of language arts instruction and did not interact with the students or teacher to any great extent. The amount of interaction with students and teachers that occurred while students were working was largely dependent upon the comfort and distractibility levels of the participants. During observations, observers were frequently able to ask the teacher brief questions during instructional breaks. As the year progressed, the observers increasingly interacted with the students, asking brief questions about the activities in which they were engaged (for example, "What are you writing?", "How did you know how to spell that?", or "What do you do when you don't know a word?"). In addition, the observers regularly documented the types and levels of materials used as well as various characteristics of student writing.

Information culled from the observations was recorded as written field notes throughout the observation periods. Two complete sets of field notes were maintained, and at frequent intervals, the two primary observers reviewed each other's notes and discussed similarities and differences in their observations of the same classrooms. In order to maximize the accuracy of the notes and facilitate later analyses, the three language principles recommended by Spradley (1980) were followed in taking field notes. For each entry, the language used—whether it was the observer's or the teacher's—was noted (the *language identification principle*). Whenever possible, the language of the teachers and students was recorded verbatim (the *verbatim principle*). When interactions or events were recorded, they were described using concrete language; observers made a conscious effort to keep abstract jargon from being used in field notes (the *concrete principle*). In addition to the field notes, maps were made of each classroom indicating the relative space and location of students, teacher, desks, chairs, books, and other available materials.

Interviews

Twice during the year (in March and in June), in-depth ethnographic interviews were conducted with each participating teacher. Teachers each received $25 for each interview. The primary purpose of the remuneration was to communicate to the teachers an appreciation and respect for the value of their time.

Interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim. Consistent with ethnographic methods, the first interview was semi-structured in format, following an outline developed from the information emerging from ongoing observations. Teachers were encouraged to speak at length about topics they felt were important, and were permitted to pursue

tangents not covered by the outline. The purpose of the first interview was to clarify observed practices and explore teachers' beliefs and purposes for the methods and approaches they used in literacy instruction. The questions that were presented to all participants are recorded in Appendix A. Because teacher practices differed somewhat and the interviews permitted some flexibility to pursue points that seemed important or in need of clarification, no two interviews were identical. Appendix B includes a sampling of questions posed to specific teachers.

When the first ethnographic interviews were conducted, approximately halfway through the study (in March), the transcriptions were subjected to the same type of coding applied to the field notes (see *data coding* below). In general, the information provided in the interviews was consistent with the information emerging from the observations, and thus served as a source of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In instances where information offered in the interviews conflicted with information obtained during observations, these instances were probed to determine whether actual differences existed or whether perceived differences were actually a matter of different definitions among researchers and teachers—differences between the etic and the emic perspectives (Wolcott, 1988). This process involved going back to the teachers and classrooms for clarification and, ultimately, fine tuning of emerging patterns and hypotheses. (Instances in which researchers and teachers differed in their interpretations of classroom practice were, in fact, rare.)

The second interview also included the types of questions included in the first interview. However, the primary purpose of the second interview was to serve as a member-check on the individual models of instruction emerging from the data. Thus, each teacher was presented with an individualized model of literacy instruction developed from the observations, interviews, and artifacts collected throughout the school year. Each teacher was asked to review the model and critique it from his or her perspective. Specifically, teachers were asked to search for inconsistencies, gaps, errors, or misrepresentations in the models. One teacher's model is included in Appendix C.

Artifacts

Throughout the observations, classroom artifacts were noted, collected, and examined. Observers recorded titles and reading levels of books used for read aloud, reading groups, and independent reading. Writing journals spanning the school year were examined and pages periodically xeroxed for closer study. More formal samples of student writing were collected and examined throughout the year. Other artifacts noted and collected included posters, charts, available books (on shelves, in desks, in the library, available for take-home), student projects, and a wide variety of teaching devices and classroom materials. Information about artifacts was integrated into the classroom models emerging from the observational data. Furthermore, samples of student work products and records of their reading materials were ultimately used to assess levels of students'

reading and writing achievement in each classroom.

Data Coding

The process of condensing vast quantities of qualitative data into manageable, meaningful units and assigning labels to the information compiled during a study is the process of *coding*. Specifically, the coding process in this study was described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Initial data from observations and interviews were reviewed line by line, and beside each line or paragraph, categories or labels were generated to describe the data. After each observation session, the field notes were reviewed and coded and details and gaps were filled in. Again, the three principles described above were used to guide these edits. Thus, consistent with the method of constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), analyses and data collection intermingled throughout the course of the study.

For each classroom, each observer built a model of instruction, identifying categories of experience and relating those categories to one another. During subsequent observations and during the first interview, investigators looked for information confirming or refuting emerging categories. Gaps were filled in as well, with new categories added to the model as needed. Questions and gaps that became obvious during analyses were used to focus subsequent observations. By the conclusion of observations, for both observers and for all classrooms, the emerging models had stabilized so that no new categories or important relations between categories were being detected during final visits. As described above, these models were then presented to the teachers for consideration during the second interview.

Validity and Reliability

The criteria for validity and reliability in a qualitative study are necessarily different from those applied to a study using quantitative methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss validity and reliability in terms of four basic criteria: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. They compare these to the traditional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Validity

A number of techniques were employed in this study to ensure its validity, or to use Lincoln and Guba's term, its credibility. These techniques included three types of triangulation: data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1989). *Data triangulation* was accomplished by collecting data in nine different classrooms and on a number of different occasions in each classroom. This technique enabled us to compare data collected from various sources and times, increasing the likelihood that emerging themes and hypotheses were truly representative of the phenomena studied. *Methodological triangulation* was obtained by using both observational and interview methods. That is, data were collected through more than one method, and the data emerging from the two methods were then searched for consistencies. Finally, three

investigators were involved conducting classroom observations. The two primary investigators met regularly to compare emerging codes and findings in the data. Data from the third investigator were compared less formally and served as a validity check on emerging findings. The information emerging through these processes was constantly cross-checked to ensure that what one investigator observed was not simply a fluke, and that all investigators were aware of the findings emerging in the data of the others. This technique was intended to reduce bias on the part of any one investigator. Denzin refers to this as *investigator triangulation*.

In addition to the technique of triangulation, negative case analysis was employed to refine themes and hypotheses so that ultimately they could account for all known cases in the data. This process involves searching the data for examples that *disconfirm* emerging themes. Thus, the process of data analysis in this study was continuously (and consciously) self-critical.

One of the criticisms of much of the existing educational research is that it lacks ecological validity. That is, in an effort to control all possible variables, researchers carry out unnaturally brief, contrived studies outside of the classroom. We attempted to counter this criticism by using *prolonged engagement* in the classrooms. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this technique as the investment of sufficient time to learn a culture, test for misinformation, and build trust with informants. By spending the better part of a school year in the classrooms being studied, we were able to become very familiar with their classroom cultures and build what seemed to be trusting relationships with the participating teachers.

A final technique intended to maximize validity of this study was the technique of member checking, in which emerging the models were presented to the members of the original groups from whom the data were collected—in this case, the teachers—for consideration during the second interview. Our goal in asking teachers to participate in model development in this way was to produce models of literacy instruction that would reflect not only the researchers' (*etic*) perspective, but a valid *emic* perspective of the classroom culture as well. By constantly comparing the two perspectives and searching them for similarities and differences, we were able, ultimately, to develop a single coherent model of outstanding first-grade reading instruction that includes both the researchers' and the teachers' perspectives.

Reliability

Reliability is somewhat more difficult to establish in qualitative research, because the instruments of data collection are the investigators themselves. A number of techniques have been recommended—none without criticism. In this study, the principle approach to reliability was through triangulation (of data, methods, and investigators) and through the establishment of interrater reliability during each stage of the coding and model-building processes. Initially, interrater reliability was obtained to ensure that the three investigators were in fact recording the same types of information in the classrooms. Where differences were found,

agreement was reached so that all observers were recording the same basic events, activities, and interactions. Later, as coding schemes began to emerge, interrater reliability was again established and then checked periodically to ensure that the same or conceptually similar codes were being used consistently across observers. Finally, the models of individual teachers and eventually of outstanding reading instruction were drafted individually by each of the primary investigators and then checked against one another to ensure reliability across investigators. Throughout this process, there was very little disagreement between the observers, with all of the conclusions offered here supported by multiple observations in each observer's field notes and analyses of field notes.

Results

Measures of Student Achievement

Once the individual teacher models had been confirmed by the teachers during the second interviews, then attention shifted back to the analysis of outstanding versus more typical teaching. We did not, however, simply analyze the teaching of nominated-outstanding versus nominated-typical teachers. During the course of the study, achievement differences between classes became obvious, with several types of data used to differentiate the relative capabilities of the teachers. Three types of information were obtained over the course of the year that were informative about the academic progress of students: reading levels, writing levels, and student engagement.

Reading Levels

It became obvious, as the year progressed, that in some classes students were reading more challenging texts on average than in other classes. The observers systematically recorded titles and reading levels (when available) of texts read during lessons and during free choice reading periods. The variability on this dimension was high by the end of the year, with most students in some classes consistently reading at or above a beginning second-grade level and with most students in other classes typically reading materials below a beginning second-grade level. Students in these low-achievement classes were frequently observed reading from primer-level basals or from small books with highly predictable text and limited vocabulary.

Students in most classes had opportunities to read words and sentences in isolation, as part of lessons in decoding or grammar. These types of exercises were recorded and are described below. However, determinations of students' reading levels were based solely on their reading of connected text (stories, poems, and nonfiction pieces).

As would be expected, there was a range of reading levels, not only between classes, but within each classroom as well. Although no formal measures were used to assess students' reading achievement in September, teacher reports indicated a wide range in all classrooms. Interview data indicate that in each classroom, there were one to three children who began the year not knowing all of their letters. In addition, there were several children in each classroom who began the year reading

fluently at least at a late-first-grade level. The number of these children was greatest in District B, where parents tended to be well educated and only 5% of students received free and reduced price lunches. The numbers were lowest in Districts A and D, where parental education was more variable and more children received free and reduced price lunches (see Table 1).

The disadvantages of not having pretest measures are acknowledged below in the discussion section. It is our contention, however, that valid, objective measures of literacy development would be extremely difficult to collect at the beginning of first grade, because teachers and parents (justifiably) oppose testing during the first few weeks of school. Moreover, by the end of the first month or two, differences in teachers have already created measurable differences in student performance that would confound the results of any pretest measures. For example, observations now being conducted by one of us as part of another project reveal significant differences in teacher expectations and student-written products as early as the seventh week of school.

Writing Levels

By the end of the year there were clear between-class differences in length and coherence of writing as well as correlated differences in the use of mechanics. In some classes, many students wrote compositions from one to three pages long on the same topic with many words spelled correctly and much of the punctuation correct. The following is a writing sample from a student in one of these classes who was rated as average by his teacher (H3):

> My best friend is my brother, we go to camp together. We go swimming off the dock. Our Grampa takes us fishing in a boat. We ride our bikes on the camp roads. We get up early in the mornig and go for a ride to get chocolate milk and donutes. Then, we go for a ride around the lake. We go for a ride to Sand Island and play on the island. We have campfires at night and roast marshmellows. (spelling as in original)

At the other extreme were classes in which most compositions were a few sentences long at most, with spelling and punctuation generally unconventional. For example, an average student in one of these classes (L3) wrote, "I lov my mom I lov my dad I lov my dog he is my bets frend." Much of the writing in these classes consisted of single-sentence responses to questions posed by the teacher or on a worksheet.

Engagement

For the purposes of this study, a student was coded as engaged if he or she was actively involved in a learning activity. Thus, reading, writing, listening, or talking about a relevant topic would be coded as "engaged." Staring out the window, engaging in idle chatter, or fiddling with the contents of one's desk would all be coded as "non-engaged." Early in the year, observers noticed striking differences in student engagement between classes and began recording them systematically. Specifically, observers surveyed the classroom every five to ten minutes and counted the number of children who appeared to be engaged. During coding, these numbers were converted to percentages. In some classes, most students

were engaged most of the time. Typical engagement rates in these classrooms ranged from 80% to 100%. In contrast, other classes were much more variable, including some classes in which low attentiveness was common. For example, in one such classroom, typical engagement rates ranged from 50% to 65%.

Teacher Groupings as a Function of Student Achievement

By the end of the year, three clusters of teachers emerged from the sample. In the cluster of teachers with highest-achieving students, most students were reading at or above grade level, and most students were writing compositions that were typically a page or longer with accurate punctuation and capitalization. Furthermore, while we focused on the progress of the *majority* of students in each class, we also noted that the low-achieving students in these classes had made considerable progress and, with the exception of one student with Down Syndrome, were all reading materials at a mid- to late-first-grade level. Except for the student noted above, all of these struggling students were writing coherent, fairly well-punctuated compositions of at least a page in length. Typically, in the classes with the highest-achieving students, all or nearly all of the students—including the low achievers—were engaged in ongoing activities and at no time was engagement observed to be less than 60%.

In general, the teachers with highly engaged students were those who were able to meet students' individual learning needs. However, each of the three teachers in the high-achievement group had his or her own approach for accomplishing this. One taught reading and writing in two ability-based groups that met daily. Within each group, students sometimes worked on independent assignments or in pairs or small groups. The other two teachers generally had some whole group activity followed by variable groupings. The first teacher indicated that she did not use whole group instruction because it required the teacher to "target some group" (H2, I1, p.1). She also believed that "it's really boring and really horrible for the kids who already know ... the things you're teaching to have to sit there and listen to them again." In contrast, the second teacher in this group believed strongly that all students benefited from interacting with the whole group:

> I think ... that the whole group discussion that we have in the beginning ... lets everybody be part of the group. And not, "Well, I gotta go over here 'cause I'm a bluebird, and I'm not as good as the other birds in the group. I'm more on equal ground being able to share with the rest of them. And, I'm privy to their strengths in language. I can hear what they're saying. And, when I leave that meeting ... a lot of things have been brought to my attention—that are going to help me or set me up for success in the next thing I'm going to do...." I think they need that warm up discussion: "What do you know about a subject?" To get everybody to talk about it. Talk about it, print it up on the board, go back over it, and then move on to your next activity. (H3, I1, p.10)

From the perspective of the observers, it was clear that another factor contributing to students' high levels of engagement in these classrooms was the teachers' enthusiasm. As one teacher put it, "You can never tell the

kids, 'Do as I say, not as I do.' You can't. They ... do what they see" (H1, I1, p. 26). These teachers not only enjoyed children, they also loved learning, and it showed. Thus, we never observed any of the top three teachers saying, "This is the boring part, but we have to get through it," or "Wouldn't it be great if we had a snow day tomorrow?" Rather, they presented difficult tasks as exciting challenges and consistently gave the impression that school was *the* place to be.

At the other extreme in our measures of achievement were three classes in which both reading and writing were unimpressive relative to the three strongest classrooms. Many students in these classrooms ended the year reading at an early- to mid-first-grade level; a significant minority were still reading books with only one word per page. The writing in these classrooms tended to be unorganized, poorly punctuated, and very brief (a few sentences at most). And engagement was either extremely variable (ranging from 20% to 85% in one classroom) or consistently low (about 65% in another). In some cases, students were unengaged because they did not understand what they were supposed to be doing. In other cases, they simply appeared to be uninterested and, for some children, the activities and tasks presented were either too easy or too difficult and thus did not seem to merit their attention. Finally, achievement measures in the three remaining classrooms were in the middle, and more variable, with students performing better than those in the three weakest classrooms but not as uniformly well as those in the three strongest classrooms.

From the outset of the study, we viewed the supervisor nominations as only a starting point with respect to evaluation of the quality of instruction being observed. From the beginning, observers were looking for potential indicators of achievement that might provide a basis for more definitively determining the quality of teaching. In general, however, the supervisors ratings mapped on to differences we observed between teachers. Thus, for three of the four school districts, the teachers nominated as excellent differed in achievement classification, such that the students of the nominated excellent teacher were doing better than the students of the more typical teacher. Thus, School District A's nominated outstanding teacher was a high-achievement teacher, with the district's more typical teacher in the lower third of the sample. District B's outstanding teacher was in the middle third and the district's more typical teacher was in the lower third. The two nominated outstanding teachers in District C were in the middle third, and the more typical teacher was in the bottom third. In District D, both the nominated outstanding and more typical teacher were in the top third of the sample. Both were very strong teachers. Notably, District D was not an economically advantaged district; thus, it does not appear that the placement of both teachers in the top third was an artifact of socioeconomic advantage of the students.

Excerpts from the interview transcripts and field notes appear throughout the text of this paper and are identified in the following way: Teachers have been assigned a letter by achievement group (*H*igh, *M*iddle, *L*ow) and a number (1,2,3). Interview data are identified as

Interview #1 or #2 (I1, I2) and data from field notes are identified by the date of the observation and the page number of the field notes. Thus, "H2, I1, p.17" refers to a comment by one of the teachers in the high-achievement group made during the first interview and appearing on page 17 of the interview transcript.

Characteristics of Teaching in All Classrooms

Once the three achievement groups emerged, the next step in the analysis was to search the data again to identify the characteristics that most teachers had in common, as well as a set of beliefs and practices that could be used to distinguish those teachers in the highest-achievement group. Because we were ultimately more interested in the behaviors and perspectives that characterized the truly outstanding teachers and set them apart from the others, more attention is given in this results section to the characteristics that distinguish the very best teachers. Nevertheless, we cover the common characteristics briefly to make the point that grade one literacy instruction had some defining characteristics.

Table 2 lists the instructional characteristics that were observed in at least seven out of nine classrooms. In short, a great deal went on in the classrooms of all nine teachers. In the remainder of this subsection, we review some of that variation with respect to some of the main instructional characteristics in Table 2.

Skills and Authentic Literacy Activities

All of the teachers observed used some mixture of direct skills instruction and authentic whole language type activities. They differed in the proportion of instruction consistent with each perspective; in the types of activities they included; in the quality of books they used in their programs; in the level of student involvement; and in the coherency of their approaches. Thus, although one teacher might have a primarily whole language based program with high-quality books, and a moderate level of student engagement, another might have a stronger skills emphasis but still use high-quality books and have a high level of student engagement.

All of the teachers in the sample used *some* trade books in their instruction. However, outstanding teachers consistently provided a wide variety of high-quality books (i.e., award-winning books and children's classics), whereas some of the teachers in the middle- and low-achievement groups offered a much more limited (and lower quality) selection. It was much more common in these classes to see children reading *Where's Waldo* or flipping pages in an encyclopedia.

Writing Instruction

All of the teachers used the writing process model and included some type of writing on a daily basis. In all classrooms, students were expected to write drafts, make revisions, and complete final copies, at least some of the time. However, there was considerable variation in the consistency with which teachers adhered to the process and in the quality of written products. Moreover, writing assignments in various classes differed in their purpose, their format, and their place in the cur-

Table 2
Teaching Practices Common to Most or All Classrooms

Instructional characteristics observed in at least 7/9 Classrooms
Skills and Authentic Literacy Activities
Some direct instruction of decoding strategies or rules
Instruction and practice of decoding skills in the context of authentic literature
Trade books available for student reading
Time for independent reading
Teachers modeling a love of reading
Writing Instruction
Daily writing activities
Students writing primarily connected text
Writing process includes rough draft with revisions
Writing process includes teacher conferences
Writing topics chosen primarily by the teacher
Instruction in basic rules of punctuation and capitalization
Spelling programs
Use of some worksheets
Classroom Arrangement
desks arranged in small groups
rug area with easel for group instruction
small table for groups and teacher conferences
information posted around the room on commercial and teacher-made posters
Instructional Groupings
Both whole group and small-group teaching configurations
At least some cooperative learning activities
Students read or wrote in pairs
Some independent seatwork (most often expressive writing activities)
Reinforcement
Students received lots of positive attention throughout the day
Some verbal negative feedback used to address student misbehavior or inattention

Table. 2 (continued)

Classroom Atmosphere and Teacher Dedication
Teachers dedicated to helping students grow and achieve
Classroom atmosphere consistently conveyed caring for students
Classroom atmosphere non-competitive
Students appeared to be comfortable with classroom routines
Instructional planning evident
Parent Participation
Recognition of the importance of parental participation and modeling in children's literacy development
Reported variation in parent participation from year to year—regardless of teacher practices

riculum. Finally, teachers had varying expectations for the length of student writing and for the appropriate use of writing conventions. In eight out of nine classrooms, writing topics were determined primarily by the teacher.

Spelling Programs

Eight out of nine teachers had some form of weekly spelling program. In some classes, word selection was based on individual student interest or need; in others, it was entirely teacher determined—usually based on a common skill; and in still other classes, the weekly list combined the two formats.

Worksheets

Most teachers (seven out of nine) were observed using worksheets, at least occasionally. Some used them regularly for skills practice (decoding, writing conventions or content themes), some used them occasionally to address a particular weakness, and some gave them to students to help to settle them down after a transition.

Classroom Arrangement

All but one classroom had desks arranged in small groups that changed from time to time (some more regularly than others). In addition, all of the classrooms contained small tables that were used for teacher-student conferences or small-group activities. The walls of the classrooms displayed information in the form of commercial and teacher-made posters, student artwork, and student- written work. The quality and coherence of information varied as did its accessibility to students. Some teachers regularly displayed student work; others rarely did so, or when they did, it seemed to be for lack of anything better to fill the space (as, for example, when a teacher would fill a bulletin board with examples of a relatively trivial worksheet). In some classrooms, the information displayed was clearly linked to ongoing instructional themes and provided students with additional information. In other classrooms, the same

commercial posters stayed up all year and teachers were never observed to refer to them in instruction.

Instructional Groupings

All of the teachers conducted some lessons in small groups and asked students to read and write independently on a regular basis. Eight of the nine teachers incorporated some form of ability grouping for instruction. In addition, most teachers encouraged students to read or write with a partner at least some of the time. In most classes, small-group activities were teacher-directed; six of the nine teachers asked students to work cooperatively in groups without the guidance or supervision of an adult. Eight of the nine teachers used whole group instruction for a variety of purposes.

Reinforcement

Observers recorded as many teacher-student interactions as they could and coded these interactions for their apparent purpose, their tone, and their effect on student behavior. In all but one classroom, students received a great deal of positive attention throughout the day. Teachers differed in the kinds of student behaviors they chose to reward with such attention. For example, in one outstanding classroom, students were consistently praised for their effort and attention as well as for correct responses. In another classroom in the middle group, students were praised for expressing interest and at times that appeared (to both observers and students) to be random. That is, this teacher's praise did not appear to be tied to any particular type of desired behavior. When questioned about this, this teacher indicated that she used this approach as part of her attempt to catch students being good. In another classroom in the lowest group, students were rarely praised at all and, when they were, it tended to be for the neatness of their written work or for being quiet during instructional time.

Negative feedback was observed at times in most classrooms, primarily in response to disruptive or inattentive student behavior. In all but one classroom, however, the tone was predominantly positive. The one exception was a teacher in the low group who rarely praised students and often gave public negative feedback in response to student work products as well as in response to undesired behaviors.

Classroom Atmosphere and Teacher Dedication

Throughout the interviews and observations, it was obvious that all of the teachers cared for their students and were dedicated to helping them grow and achieve in their classrooms. Even in instances where teacher behavior appeared to observers to be rather harsh, the explanations expressed during the interviews made it clear that each teacher believed that his or her behavior was in the best interest of the students.

For the most part, teachers appeared to make a conscious effort to create non-competitive atmospheres in their classrooms and encouraged children to get along with one another.

Parent Participation

Finally, all of the teachers recognized the importance of parental participation in children's literacy development. Modeling literate behaviors was reported by all teachers to be the most important role for parents. While most teachers expressed some disappointment in actual levels of parents school involvement, they differed in their confidence that they could overcome the effects of limited involvement. Outstanding teachers were more likely to believe they could foster literate behaviors even in those students whose parents were not involved in their learning. Furthermore, *all* teachers reported year-to-year variation in the level of parent participation. Thus, it did not appear to be the case that outstanding teachers were consistently able to induce high levels of parent participation. Rather, it was their reaction to limited involvement that set them apart from their peers.

Summary

In every class, it was clear that teaching first grade is a complex panoply of strategies and activities. Consistent with the survey data described earlier (Pressley et al., 1996), all of the teachers made some attempt to combine authentic reading and writing activities with at least some direct instruction in basic skills. Their instruction included daily reading and writing activities, although the focus and content of those activities varied widely from one class to the next. Through their interactions with students and their discussions with us, the teachers all demonstrated that they were dedicated to their jobs and most worked hard to create positive, cooperative atmospheres in their classrooms. Finally, all of the teachers we worked with noted the importance of parent involvement in students' literacy development.

Distinguishing Characteristics

In addition to the common practices observed in most, if not all of the classrooms, a set of characteristics was identified that, as a cluster, distinguished the perspectives and practices of the three teachers in the highest-achievement group. Table 3 lists this set of characteristics. Importantly, these characteristics were not entirely absent among the teachers in the other two groups; in fact, all of them were observed to some degree in other classrooms. However, the three teachers found to be truly outstanding exhibited consistently high levels of *all* of the characteristics listed in Table 3.

Instructional Balance

As noted above, all of the participating teachers used at least some combination of high-quality literature with many opportunities for authentic reading and writing (consistent with the whole language perspective) as well as explicit instruction in the basic skills of reading and writing (consistent with a more hierarchical skills-based approach to instruction). Among teachers in the outstanding group, however, this combination was exceptionally well integrated and balanced. Moreover, the integration of the two approaches in these classrooms was deliberate and well thought out.

Table 3

Distinguishing Characteristics of Teachers in the Highest Student Achievement Group
Instructional balance
Instructional density
Extensive use of scaffolding
Encouragement of self-regulation
Thorough integration of reading and writing activities
High expectations for all students
Masterful classroom management
Awareness of Purpose

According to one of the three teachers with highest achievement, teaching beginning reading,

> is a fine balance between immersing the child in whole language and teaching through. . . . sounds, going back to using skills. . . . If you don't have a balance, it's kind of like trying to fit a square through a circle. It doesn't work. You don't connect with everyone if you don't use a variety of [teaching] strategies. (H1, I1, p.13)

Another teacher in this group indicated that "any one of those specific [approaches] is not enough for the children. They need to be introduced to, or made aware of, other kinds of reading besides just that specific program" (H3, I1, p. 2).

The three strongest teachers taught decoding skills explicitly. They had lists of the basic reading skills students should master in first grade, and planned instruction to address those skills. They varied considerably in the ways that they presented those skills, however. One teacher used a basal series in ability-based reading groups. Another followed the scope and sequence from a basal, but generally created his own lessons and activities for presenting and practicing the skills. He generally taught skills in a whole group format and had students practice them in small groups, in pairs, or independently. And the third teacher had a continuum of skills, which she incorporated into authentic literacy activities. This teacher rarely taught skills in groups, preferring to teach individual students who demonstrated a need for instruction. All three teachers provided individualized instruction and review for students who needed it, with the first teacher described providing the least (possibly because she had ability-based groups, and thus introduced skills at different rates to begin with), and the last teacher providing the most.

In addition to planned, explicit instruction, all three of the teachers with high-achieving students were highly skilled at incorporating miniskill lessons into ongoing lessons as opportunities presented themselves. For example, on the day before Valentine's Day, one teacher managed to insert minilessons on shapes and phonemic awareness as she introduced an art project:

> *T*: Miss (X) thinks of things when she thinks of Valentine's day, too, and I wrote them down. What shape did I write them on? (students are quiet) Is it a square? A circle? A rectangle? A triangle? What shape is it?
> S_1: A heart.
> *T*: Can anyone try to spell "heart"?
> S_2: H-E-A-R-T.
> *T*: My goodness. If I wanted to use my *sounds* to spell heart, what would I start with?
> S_3: H.
> *T*: And what would it end with?
> S_3: T.
> *T*: So right away, you know some of the letters in "heart."

In addition to—and often as part of—explicit skills instruction, the very best teachers provided many opportunities for students to engage in authentic reading and writing activities. Students in these classes read many books alone, in pairs, and with the teacher. They heard good literature read aloud. They used books to search for information on topics of interest. They wrote letters and notes, recorded plant growth in their gardens, and described the growth and development of the chicks hatching in their classrooms. All of these activities were meaningfully linked to ongoing themes and specific skills instruction.

In contrast to the integrated, balanced approach displayed by teachers in the top group, the other teachers tended to present instruction that was either heavily skills-based or heavily whole language, *or* they attempted to combine the two approaches but did so in a disjointed or inconsistent way. Thus, one teacher in the middle group whose instruction was heavily influenced by the whole language philosophy also had a weekly spelling program based on basic decoding skills. Students learned to spell word families and practiced words each week but were not necessarily expected to be responsible for their spelling words when they wrote stories or compositions in their journals. Another teacher in the low group used a basal series for both reading and writing, and students rarely had the opportunity to read and write for authentic purposes. This teacher supplemented her reading groups with learning centers, which only sometimes required literacy behaviors. In many instances, when students were asked what they were supposed to be doing at a center (for example, copying a poem or gluing together parts of a snowman), and why they thought they were doing it, their responses were simply, "I don't know," or "Because Mrs. X told us to."

Instructional Density

One of the most striking characteristics of the outstanding instruction was its density. The teachers in this group were able to integrate multiple goals into a single lesson. As noted, they frequently inserted minilessons on topics that arose in the course of their lessons. It seemed that these teachers never did just one thing at a time. For example, in the excerpt

below, a teacher used a lesson on the long o sound to build on children's vocabulary and concept development:

(Students were seated at their desks thinking of long o words spelled with the letters o-a.)
T: How about something that mom puts in the oven—a kind of meat?
S_1: Meat loaf!
T: I was thinking of something else, but that's a good one too.
S_2: Roast beef!
T: Yes. Roast. Put that on your list. Tom, can you spell that for us?
S_3: R-O-A-S-T.
T: (teacher writes "roast" on an easel pad) Does that look right?
Ss: Yes.
T: O.K. Now, I like that word that Kevin thought of. What was that?
S_1: Loaf.
T: O.K. Put that on your lists. Kevin, how do you spell "loaf"?
S_1: L-O-A-F.
T: (writes "loaf" on the easel pad) O.K. Now, how about something small that comes in a bar?
Ss: Soap! (A student spells "soap" and the teacher writes it on the pad.)
T: What happens when you put wood in water?
Ss: It floats!
T: What's something you wear when it's chilly outside?
S_4: A coat!
T: And what did Anthony wear in the story we read yesterday?
S_5: A cloak.
T: What's the difference between a coat and a cloak?
S_5: A cloak doesn't have any sleeves. (H3, 2/2, p.1)

During another class, this same teacher began a lesson on potatoes that tied into both a science unit on plants and a miniunit on Ireland. In this excerpt he manages to insert a minilesson on using the encyclopedia:

T: Where else might we get more information about potatoes?
S_1: A potato book!
T: (laughs) A potato book. Where else might we look up information about something like potatoes?
S_2: An encyclopedia!
T: An encyclopedia. What would we look up?
S_3: Potato.
T: Under what letter?
S_3: P!
T: (returns to a discussion of the book he's introducing) (H3, 3/16, p.3)

In another classroom, even filling the stapler became an opportunity for teaching:

T: What color are staples?
S_1: Gray.
S_2: Silver!
T: Silver. Why did you change your minds from gray to silver?
S_3: It sparkles.
S_4: It reflects the light.
T: Yes. What does that mean—reflects? It means the light bounces off it—so it sparkles. (H1, 2/13, p.10)

This teacher frequently dismissed children from an activity by saying, "When I spell the word (bird, Santa, heart ...) you may go back to your seats."

Clearly these teachers are able to think well on their feet. However, their ability to incorporate many goals into a single lesson was not merely a sign of quick thinking. In many cases, these teachers were not only *aware* of the

multiple goals they were meeting, but had planned them intentionally. For example, when asked about the intended purpose of journal writing, one teacher indicated that she used it for diagnostic purposes; as a medium for children's free expression; as an opportunity to practice capitalization and punctuation; and to teach specific reading and writing skills to individual students.

In contrast, another teacher in the low group explained the purpose of her reading groups in this way:

> Well, basically when we read out of the basal books, it's pretty much reading the next story, whatever that may be, and then there are some ... workbook pages ... the workbook page itself is an assessment of what they read—and how they follow, even down the page.... But just orally listening to them read; watching them to see if they're paying attention; following along while others read. You know, you can tell so much just in that short time—how they're coming along. (L1, I1, p.17)

Overall, students' mornings in the classrooms with outstanding teachers were filled with a density of high-quality reading and writing experiences. In contrast, in the more typical classrooms, students spent significant portions of time in activities that were not nearly as intense or literacy relevant (such as copying or asking each other rote questions). They also tended to spend more time in transitions or waiting for teacher direction (see *Management* below). Their lessons typically consisted of a single instructional goal and one or two types of activities used to present it. The more average teachers rarely strayed from intended lessons to insert minilessons, with the result being many missed opportunities for learning.

Extensive Use of Scaffolding

One characteristic of outstanding teachers that contributed greatly to the density of their instruction was these teachers' use of *scaffolding* to help students learn. Scaffolding is the process whereby a teacher monitors students' learning carefully and steps in to provide assistance on an as-needed basis (Pressley & McCormick, 1995). Effective scaffolding is tailored to individual needs and provides just enough information—not too much or too little—to enable a student to make progress toward a learning goal. Often this means simply directing the child's attention to important dimensions of the problem (e.g., "What letter do you see at the end of that word?"); providing clues so that the child can then solve the problem on his or her own. The theory (e.g., Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) is that, eventually, the child will internalize the thinking processes modeled or cued by the adult and will be able to solve the problem independently.

The teachers in the outstanding group were extremely skillful at scaffolding their students' learning. They seemed to be able to monitor student thought processes as they taught and interceded with just enough help to facilitate learning, but not so much that they lost the flow of the lesson. Scaffolding very often took the form of questioning.

In discussing a student's spelling, for example, one teacher gave the following example:

> I say to him, "Well, what's the rule that makes the long sound?" And he says, "Oh, I need a silent e at the end." When [I]'ve

drawn it back out of him instead of saying, "The rule is: put an e at the end." When he [gives] the proper answer, you're moving him to another—a higher level. (H3, I1, p. 2)

In another high-achieving classroom, a weak reader was observed asking the teacher how to spell "duck," resulting in the following interaction:

T: D-U- what's at the end?
S: I don't know.
T: (writes on the board: "duk") Does that look right?
S: No.
T: No. What's missing?
S: (No response)
T: How do you spell "back"?
S: B-A-C-K.
T: So, how are you going to spell "duck"?
S: D-U-C-K.
T: Good. (Writes "duck" on the board.) (H2, 3/27, p.7)

The students had just completed a choral reading of a chart poem about bugs when this interaction was observed in the third high-achievement class in our sample:

T: O.K. I need my detectives. Can you find a compound word that's a bug? (A number of students raise their hands.) When I'm looking for a compound word, what am I looking for?
S_1: It's a word ... (student gives a long-winded, somewhat confusing explanation)
T: How can I be sure it's a compound word?
S_1: Two words
T: Any two words? What's special about them?
S_2: Two words put together.
T: What compound word was I looking for?
S_3: Firefly.
T: What two little words make up firefly?
S_4: Fire—fly.
T: Are there any other compound words [in the poem]?
S_5: Themselves. (H1, 5/22, p. 3)

In each of these examples (and in many others), the outstanding teachers were able to help their students move forward and acquire certain academic skills that they were not quite able to acquire on their own. These teachers constantly made use of potential learning opportunities as they arose. The other six teachers in the sample, who were less skilled at scaffolding, were more likely to stick closely to intended lessons and did not appear to be as aware of student thinking. Thus, they were less likely to anticipate problems and areas of confusion, with the result being many missed opportunities for learning.

Encouragement of Self-Regulation

In order for students to develop into good readers and writers, they must learn the skills and behaviors of literacy. But there is more to being a good reader or a good thinker than being able to decode the words on a page or knowing how to punctuate a sentence correctly. Good thinkers have the metacognitive awareness to know when and where to apply the skills they have learned. They are able to monitor themselves and they know when they need to use a different strategy or speed things up or slow them down. Throughout their instruction, the outstanding teachers in this study encouraged students to monitor their progress and understanding, and taught students what to do when they found themselves having difficulty.

One outstanding teacher described it this way:

> In the beginning of the year, I always write the parents a letter about, "My goal is to help your child become more independent." Because I think being independent fosters everything else. It's the basis for everything. (H1, I1, p. 30)

In regard to reading, she explained,

> I think you need to provide the kids with the strategies that they need to be good readers. You have to make sure that they know what those strategies are. Like, if they do get to a word they don't know, they have to know their options. What am I going to do next? Can I skip over the word? Can I use the picture clues to help me figure out what this word is? Can I know the words around it to help me figure out what the word is? So you have to provide them with all those ... it's like a problem-solving ability almost—in math. But geared toward reading. (H1, I1, p. 2)

The outstanding teachers encouraged metacognitive thinking in their students by frequently asking them to explain how they had arrived at a particular answer. What strategies did they use? What clues did they have? Furthermore, they often asked these questions in front of a group, giving the student an opportunity to model his or her thought processes for the rest of the class. During one observation when a student self-corrected during a read-aloud activity, the teacher asked, "When Kevin made a mistake, what did he do?" (S: "He went back.") "He went back over it. Is it O.K. to make mistakes?" (Ss: "Yes"). (H3, 5/4, p. 3) These teachers also encouraged students to monitor the quality of their work products by asking frequently, "Is this your best work?"

In addition to teaching students reading strategies and the conditional knowledge to apply them, the outstanding teachers encouraged students to monitor their *behavior* as well. They gave time warnings so that students would be able to finish their work, or at least reach a comfortable stopping point. For example, warnings such as this one were common: "We've got about 10 minutes to work. That's not very much time. I'm going to set the timer to remind us." (H3, 3/16, p. 13) Later, when the timer went off, the teacher asked the class, "How many of you are thinking you're going to need more time to work on this?" Simple reminders such as this one helped students monitor their work time and plan effectively. This teacher also had a device which emitted a signal when the noise level of a group got too high, and he sometimes videotaped groups at work so that he and his students could watch the tape and observe how well they were working.

Thorough Integration of Reading and Writing Activities

In the classrooms with outstanding teachers, reading and writing were interwoven, with students frequently writing about what they were reading and using books to further develop topics they chose for writing. According to these teachers, writing, "is an integral part" of reading development. (H2, I1, p.2) They frequently used writing to teach specific reading and writing skills as well as a means of expression for their students. One teacher had her student write reports: a project that included library research, notes on notecards, and a final illustrated product. All of the teachers used the writing process (Graves, 1983) in

some form. That is, they all had students write drafts, conference with a teacher or peer, and edit their early draft(s) into final copy—at least for some assignments. In the classes with the outstanding teachers, this process typically seemed to be better understood and used more productively by students. That is, students in these classes made more revisions and more frequently wrote a final copy that included a relatively high level of organization, vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Their conferences were more substantive, resulting in meaningful revisions in their drafts.

When we commented in an interview on the relative sophistication of student writing in one class where students regularly used story webs to map out their ideas, the teacher's response was,

> Well, yes. They can write a whole page. But if I just said, "Go write about your best friend," they weren't going to write a whole page. O.K.? There is a *lot* of preliminary discussion that happens before they go and do that. I mean, we sit down and we make a little web. Best friends. What are some things we know? You fill out several things on the web. *Then* you can go and write—what appears to look like a paragraph—looks more like a paragraph than a single sentence kind of thing. Some of them, if I just said, "Go and write about a best friend," they'd come back—*some* of them would come back and they'd have a page filled. But, I would never see the kind of successful long-term writing from the number of kids that I do if they didn't have that kind of writing process. (H3, I1, p. 11)

In contrast to the writing conferences observed in the top three classes, conferences in other classes were often much less productive. In one class, for example, students met in a group to give each other feedback on stories they had written about bunnies. The students were instructed to ask the author questions to clarify parts they did not understand and, when possible, to make suggestions for changes. What actually happened was that after each student read his or her story, another student asked, "If you had a bunny, what would you name it?": A question that had nothing to do with any of the stories presented. Apart from a few spelling errors corrected by the teacher, no editing was observed during the 20-minute group conference. (L3, 6/5, p. 9)

In addition to integrating reading and writing activities, the outstanding teachers also integrated reading, writing, and the content area curricula. For example, if the science unit was on plants, students would be reading about plants, growing a garden, measuring their vegetables, recording the measurements in a notebook, and writing about their classroom experiences and related fiction. Put simply, literacy was a part of virtually everything that went on in the top three classrooms. When we asked one teacher to estimate what percentage of her students' day was spent actively reading, she replied,

> I would say everything we do in here ... is so integrated that, to do any activity in here, they need to read something. So I would say for everything we do in here there is a reading portion. So most of the day.... They are immersed in that text! So—well, you just find ways to incorporate it. It *can't* be separate. You can't be driving along and say, "Oh! I've got to read that sign. So, I better stop, read the sign, and then go on." It's just there. It's a part of

your day. And that's how it is in here, too. (H1, I1, p. 25)

High Expectations for All Students

Research has long explored the relationship between teachers' expectations and student accomplishments. While the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) is not strongly supported (Raudenbush, 1984), teacher expectations have at least three effects on students: They influence the way in which teachers treat students (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1986; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985); they tend to perpetuate themselves (e.g., Cooper & Good, 1983); and they can ultimately affect students' self-concepts (e.g., Grant, 1985). The teachers in the top group of this study displayed consistently high expectations for all of their students. In a representative comment, one teacher indicated,

> I truly believe that you take every kid from where they are and move them forward ... I do expect really high level—I think a *really* high level of achievement from kids. And I tend not to look at grade level particularly at all ... I tend to just move them along in books. (H2, I1, p. 2)

Asked to consider his philosophy of literacy development in first grade, another of the three best teachers, began by saying, "I think that all the kids ... who come to me ... are capable of learning to read—when they're given an approach to reading that they are comfortable with, and they're going to feel successful with" (H3, I1, p.1). In contrast, the typical teachers were more likely to cite readiness theories and differences in home environments in explaining why they expected less of some students.

Contrary to current conventional wisdom, all of the teachers shared the belief that maturation plays some role in reading development. According to one teacher in the lowest group,

> So much of it seems so much predestined by their own little beings. You know, they just seem ... for a kid who's not ready to read, I don't care what you do, if they're really not ready, they're not going to read. You can give them so many exposures, but until things click, you know, they just—you can help them, you can build the readiness, but I really feel strongly about that. That, developmentally, there need to be things *set* in order for them to take off. (L1, I1, p. 16)

The belief that maturation plays an important role in learning to read was expressed by the outstanding teachers as well. In discussing the needs of the weaker readers in his class, one outstanding teacher suggested that sometimes what they need is ...

> time. Maturation. They're just not gonna get it. You could sit there and go through that for five or six weeks working with that same sound and they just don't see how it fits together. And, suddenly, the light bulb turns on. And it fits. The pieces fit. (H3, I1, p. 5)

The difference between this teacher and some of those in the other two groups seemed to be his reaction to the situation. This teacher went on to explain that as a teacher, "you need to be able to try to find materials, stories that give them more opportunities to *make* the light bulb turn on. You know? Interesting reading. Reading at their level." Thus, while all of the teachers believed that sometimes students needed *time* to enable them to read, the outstanding teachers believed they had a responsi-

bility to continue providing individualized instruction and materials during that time—and that by doing so, they had the power to influence a child's maturation—at least a little.

Masterful Classroom Management

Outstanding teachers were masterful classroom managers. These teachers managed not only student behavior—preventing misbehavior before it could occur—but time, activities, student interactions, and outside resource people as well. Their management efforts clearly involved both planned and on-line decisions.

The top three teachers were consistently well-prepared. They knew what it was they wanted to teach, their lessons were well-planned, and they always had their materials ready and close at hand. This was done not only to make their own jobs easier but to help shape student behavior as well. As one teacher put it, "Modeling is the most important thing. So if they see someone who is organized, that can rub off—a little bit" (H1, I1, p. 18). Consistent with the research on teacher effects (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1986; Kounin, 1970; Leinhardt, Weidman, & Hammond, 1987), each of the teachers in the top group noted the importance of routines: predictable patterns of activities and expectations. For example, one teacher explained,

> I have a pattern. I do the same thing every day—so the kids know what's going on. It's fairly predictable ... in the morning we come back [from the school-wide assembly] and I take attendance and lunch count in a snap and say, "O.K. Everybody go where they're supposed to go." And everybody goes. (H2, I1, pp. 8, 25)

In contrast, in the other six classrooms more time was lost as the teachers struggled to complete morning routines and get down to instruction. Two teachers (one in the middle achievement group, one in the low group) greeted observers *each time* by explaining that their morning was fairly "chaotic," often attributing this to some unexpected change in routine. In describing the decision-making process she used in determining her room arrangement, one of these teachers said, "So I just keep moving things around. I'm never happy. I'll find something that works and then a week later, I'll change it ... [I] keep them on their toes like that" (L3, I1, p. 16).

Although the outstanding teachers followed predictable patterns of activities and expectations, they were not rigid in their adherence to planned lessons. Within the overall structure of a lesson, they maintained the flexibility to pursue topics that arose in discussions or to insert minilessons when the need became apparent. They did not, however, allow a lesson to drift completely away from its intended purpose. Thus, they were able to enrich their lessons based on student input without losing sight of the goals they had planned to address.

In addition to instructional routines, which helped to manage students' behavior and facilitate learning, the outstanding teachers were able to minimize disruptive behavior, again, by providing a predictable and consistent set of expectations and consequences. Only one of these top teachers had a formalized behavior management system. However, students in all of these classes knew what was expected of them and what to expect if their behavior was

inappropriate. For the most part, teachers minimized disruptive behavior by preventing it before it could occur. Very often, these teachers were able to redirect students' behavior in a positive way without ever resorting to criticism or punishment. For example, during one observation, students were playing at a sand table during a break time and started to get rambunctious. Rather than warning or punishing the students, the teacher simply asked one of the boys, "[Alan], do you remember what I said about where the sand goes in the sandbox?" (H3, 2/2, p. 10). With this comment, any potential problem was averted. (In over 20 hours of observations, this teacher was seen to use a negative redirection *once*.)

In addition to managing behavior, the outstanding teachers were adept at managing *time*. Transitions in these classrooms were quick; interruptions by other teachers and adults were kept brief; and time spent engaged in instructional activities was maximized.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, the outstanding teachers were markedly good managers of outside resource teachers. The aides and specialists who pushed in to these classrooms were always involved with students in instructional situations. In contrast, resource persons in other classrooms were frequently observed sitting and watching on-going group lessons, with little or no student contact.

Awareness of Purpose

The final characteristic to emerge from our analysis of the outstanding teachers was their awareness of purpose. Not only were these individuals skillful and engaging teachers, models, facilitators and managers, but they were highly aware of both their practices and the goals or purposes that drove those practices. This was in rather stark contrast to most of the other teachers. When asked to describe what they intended as the purpose of various activities (see Appendix A), the outstanding teachers as a group were clear about their intent. For example, when asked about the purpose for having students write in journals, one outstanding teacher related the following:

> Journal writing ... I use it for a lot of diagnostic purposes: Where are they in their writing? I use it so they can express themselves freely. I don't give them topics to write in their journal about. It's free choice. It's used mainly as a tool for expression.... And, I've used it—I've attached skills to it as skills come [up].... It's used for editing....They'll be reading their sentence, and I'll notice that their sentence didn't start with a capital. And I'll tell them, "Oh, I love what your sentence is about, and this and that." And I'll say, "But, I always know that a sentence starts a special way." And, they'll pick right up on it. Then, when I give them a clue like that, they know to look at their punctuation too. So it's used for writing skills too. [Skills] that don't have to be taught whole class, up on the board. "This is where we put the period. This is where...." So I use the journal for personalized instruction. I know exactly where a child's at. (H1, I1, p. 21)

In contrast, intent was less obvious in this response to the same question from a teacher in the low group:

> Maybe if they get in the habit of writing, it will become something they can use more as they get older. And start writing down

> story ideas. [The other teachers] are talking about that a lot in first grade, but ... I don't know how they can. They just don't have that yet. Eventually, I hope they will. (L2, I1, p. 17)

Discussion

The question of how best to teach young children to read and write is one of the most important and widely debated topics in the professional education literature. What has been lacking in this discussion is the systematic study of those individuals who are directly responsible for this instruction: effective teachers themselves. The purpose of this study was to tap the knowledge and expertise of highly effective teachers in an attempt to determine what makes their instruction so effective. Specifically, we used observation and interview methods to identify a cluster of characteristics that distinguished truly outstanding literacy teachers from their more average colleagues.

The outcomes obtained through these methods are substantially convergent with existing research on teacher effects as well as with the outcomes reported in the earlier survey of nominated-outstanding teachers (Pressley et al., 1996). When that survey study was first reviewed for publication, the reaction of several reviewers was that the list of instructional practices cited by the respondents was simply too long to be credible. At that time we tended to believe the teachers over the reviewers, but were unable to provide observational evidence to support our beliefs. The data reported here, however, provide ample evidence that, in fact, most of the instructional practices cited in the survey do occur in the classrooms of competent first-grade literacy teachers. Given the complexity of grade one instruction, it is not surprising that the methods described here led not to a single critical variable in defining outstanding literacy instruction, but rather to a *cluster* of practices and beliefs. All the characteristics listed in Table 3 were present in at least one other (more typical) classroom. Thus, rather than a single factor, it was the composite cluster of teaching characteristics that could be used to distinguish the exceptionally good teachers.

Among the defining characteristics that emerged in this study, some seem to be associated with effective teaching in general (and, indeed, have been consistently reported elsewhere), while others appear to be specifically related to the development of early literacy. For example, one of the critical factors to emerge from our data was teachers' ability to manage time, behavior, resource personnel, and student learning in the classroom. Management in the best classrooms was so effective, in fact, that it was often difficult to perceive that these classrooms were being managed at all. This finding, while important, is not unique to literacy instruction. The literature in teacher effectiveness consistently cites classroom management as a critical predictor of student learning, regardless of the subject (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1986; Emmer, 1987; Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980). Similarly, the encouragement of students' self-regulation increases the time students spend on task—a factor that has been linked consistently to student learning (Davis & Thomas, 1989). Thus, the following factors listed in Table 3 are viewed as characteristics of effective teach-

ing in general: extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation, high teacher expectations, classroom management, and awareness of purpose. These factors appear to be important variables in predicting student learning, regardless of the subject. Notably, some of these characteristics have been extensively researched (i.e., the use of scaffolding, teacher expectations, and classroom management), while others are less well-established, or virtually absent from the teacher-effects literature.

Factors Specific to Literacy Instruction

Two of the factors to emerge from this study are specific to literacy instruction: instructional balance, and a thorough integration of reading and writing activities. In this study, as in the survey (Pressley et al., 1996) described earlier, there was substantial evidence that excellent primary-level literacy instruction is balanced with respect to whole language practices and skills instruction. Despite the continued intensity of the debate in beginning reading in politics, the media, and many educational circles, excellent teachers seem to be proposing a "radical middle" position (Lesley Morrow, personal communication). Among the respondents to the survey cited above, 97% described themselves as "at least somewhat" committed to whole language principles; about half indicated that they were "entirely committed" to whole language. Yet these same teachers also reported including a significant portion of skills instruction in their classrooms. The practices and beliefs of the outstanding teachers described here are also consistent with this position of balance. Instruction in these classrooms was filled with high-quality literature and many opportunities for authentic reading and writing experiences. It also contained lessons dedicated specifically to particular reading or writing skills; lessons that were filled with reminders about how the skills related to children's writing and their reading. These data contribute to a growing data base suggesting that neither extreme of the current great debate in beginning reading instruction is likely to lead to maximum student achievement in literacy (McIntyre & Pressley, 1996).

Related to the characteristic of balanced instruction was the extent to which reading and writing were integrated in the very best classrooms. Students in these classrooms were typically writing about what they had read and reading to further develop their writing topics—all of which was often connected to social studies or science content. Concepts encountered on one day were related to concepts encountered on other days, so that learning was constantly rehearsed, reinforced, and made meaningful.

Reading as a Dialectical Process

The integrated, balanced instruction observed in the classrooms of exceptional teachers provides support for the interpretation of literacy instruction as a dialectical process (Riegel, 1979). From this perspective, described elsewhere (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald & Mistretta, in press), it is not only possible but necessary for literacy development to proceed at once from the parts to the whole (consistent with a skills-based, hierarchical

model of instruction), and from the whole to the parts (consistent with the whole language approach to instruction). The simultaneous progress of both of these processes was observed constantly in each of the outstanding classrooms. Students in these classrooms read (and heard) whole texts and wrote whole compositions, which motivated the learning of parts. They also learned to process the parts (individual skills), which were then applied to whole texts and compositions. The fact that outstanding teachers orchestrated fluid transitions between the two processes throughout the course of single lessons permitted the simultaneous development of both.

Future Research

Using qualitative data analysis techniques, we were able to distill the nearly 200 hours of observations conducted in this study into a cluster of characteristics that could be used to distinguish the best teachers in our sample. The observational and interview methods used here provided important insights not permitted in our previous survey research (Pressley et al., 1996). However, a number of factors in the study's design serve to limit the generalizations we can draw from our results and provide directions for future research in this area. Perhaps the most obvious limitation in generalizing our results is the population of students included in the sample. All of the participating districts were classified as suburban and served relatively similar populations of students. Previous research in teacher effects has found that different populations of students sometimes benefit from different types of instruction (e.g., Good & Brophy, 1991); thus, the type of research done here needs to be replicated with other, more diverse populations. It is our hypothesis that the characteristics in Table 3 will generalize across other populations; however, this remains to be demonstrated. In addition, the hypotheses presented here should next be tested in experimental or quasi-experimental studies, which would permit statistical control of some of the many variables present in first-grade literacy instruction. It is through this type of research that it would be possible to determine which of the characteristics found to distinguish outstanding teaching are most important, and how the various characteristics interact with one another.

Two limitations in the design used here can and should be addressed in future research. The first is the absence of pretest measures in the classrooms where we collected data. With the exception of one classroom that had a disproportionate number of at risk students, the classrooms we observed were ostensibly balanced in September with respect to strong and weak students (this according to the administrators making the nominations). Parents were not allowed input in class placement in any of the schools, and administrators typically described an effort to spread out the weaker students across the first-grade classrooms in a school. We were confident, therefore, that no glaring differences in classroom achievement existed in September. However, future findings would be strengthened by having a definitive pretest measure by which to measure end-of-year progress.

The second design issue that should be addressed in future research is the role that

school- and district-level policies may have affected both teacher practices and student outcomes. None of the participating school districts or principals enforced a heavy-handed approach to shaping teacher behavior. Teachers in all schools and districts had significant freedom to choose their materials and plan their instruction (thus the wide variation observed in practices within schools). At the same time, however, each district had its own history of reform (or lack thereof) and each school had a different principal. Future research is needed to determine the role these factors play in shaping teacher practices and beliefs, specifically with respect to beginning literacy instruction.

Conclusion

Although there is increasing understanding that a balance of whole language and skills components can result in excellent literacy instruction, research to date has not been revealing about how teachers can be educated to provide appropriately balanced experiences to their students. Moreover, the development of such teacher education occurs in an atmosphere in which extremists on both sides continue to clamor for instruction that is pure (e.g., purely whole language, Weaver, 1994; purely skills, back-to-basics movements). We believe that the work reported here and in the previously published survey (Pressley et al., 1996) provides some of the most powerful ammunition against such extremist arguments, for these data come from individuals with demonstrated expertise in primary literacy instruction. These teachers' grounding in classrooms and schools gives them a credibility not possessed by some others in the current great debate, which includes a variety of parties who are one to several steps removed from classroom teaching and student learning. The study of experts has confirmed that individuals who are very good at performing complex tasks can often provide a great deal of information about how to do such tasks, including information that escapes other less-expert onlookers (Ericsson & Smith, 1991). We have been listening to such individuals—experts in teaching literacy in the primary grades—and observing them as they teach. The excellent teachers we have studied have revealed a great deal about their practices and beliefs. Perhaps now it is time to listen to them about how they came to teach in the ways that they do as a potential guide to the development of teacher education that will result in many *more* exceptionally effective primary level teachers.

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Appendix A

First Interview Protocol

Name

School

Years teaching first grade

Other grades taught

Can you describe your philosophy of teaching reading?

What do you see as the most important components of reading instruction?

What is the focus of the children's kindergarten program?

What skills, knowledge, attitudes do they come in with?

How do you make decisions about things such as:

- desk arrangement
- allocation of time to various activities
- when to go on to something else
- whom to group for reading

Can you explain how your reading groups work (how grouped, how often, which activities, differences among high/low groups)?

What role do you see writing playing in reading development?

How do parents fit into the program (in the school's view and also in your own view)?

Do you adapt instruction for weaker readers/stronger readers?

If so, how does that instruction differ from your standard instruction?

What do you intend as the purpose of:

read aloud (by teacher, by students)

journal writing

sentence copying

silent reading

reading in partners

centers

What do you see as your students' greatest strengths when they leave first grade?

What is your favorite thing about teaching first grade?

Appendix B

Sample Questions Asked of Individual Teachers During the First Interview

(in addition to those listed in Appendix A)

What kinds of things do you ask parents to do [in your classroom]?

Can you tell which kids read at home with their parents?

Are the [students'] parents all literate?

Do [the students] help each other?

Do you consider yourself a whole language teacher?

It seemed like when you were doing your reading group, you were doing some kind of ongoing assessment of the kids ... what were you doing?

How do you know which kids are going to need more of one than the other (referring to literature and phonics instruction)?

Do you get the sense that when you give all that homework on Monday that they actually do it Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday—or do they do it all Thursday night?

Do *all* the kids take home books?

Where do you take those [poems] from?

Your focus in writing, then, is really on ... content and story development?

How often do they write in their journals?

Do you correct their journals?

What [kinds of remediation] are kids pulled out for?

Is it your principal who makes the decision to put all the remedial kids in one [class]room?

What kind of grades do you give in first grade?

Appendix C

Sample Model Presented to Teacher H3 during the Second Interview

Sample 1: Teacher H3

Philosophy

- All kids are capable of learning to read when given an approach they are comfortable with.
- Not everyone will learn using one particular program. You have to recognize that, and come up with materials that will meet the specific needs of each child.
- Kids learn from their peers. Several students working together can build and find as much information about something as possible, whereas one person working alone will be able to gather only limited information.
- All kids benefit from whole group activities—so all children should have the opportunity to listen to literature, interact through discussion.
- Approach is not whole language per se. WL does not include enough phonics.

Areas of Reading Emphasized

- decoding
- comprehension
- writing (including organization, capitalization, and punctuation)
- spelling
- listening (to stories, to peers)
- oral language
- vocabulary
- making use of resources (other books, dictionaries)
- parts of a book (title, author, illustrator, pictures, text)

Groupings

- whole group
- reading pairs (pairing done sometimes by teacher, sometimes by students)
- small groups (with and without the teacher)
- individualization
- activities coordinated to move from whole group to smaller or individual and back again

Materials

- trade books
- basals (from many different series; primary is HBJ with supplemental phonics materials)
- minibooks (part of HBJ series)
- idea webs
- minichalkboards
- dictionaries

Frequently Observed Activities

- lots of minilessons
- read aloud (by teacher and by students) with student interaction
- small groups working on projects
- variable reading groups
- independent reading
- reading from a variety of materials
- discussion with many questions
- spelling tests
- writing
- use of semantic webs

- teacher monitoring progress of small groups, redirecting when necessary
- activities include going outside to do structured activities linked to writing activities
- 1/2 hour break in middle of morning

Teaching Strategies

- scaffolds
- facilitates metacognitive development
- facilitates/models self-regulation, time management
- integrates math, science into reading instruction
- puts new material in context, makes frequent use of students' background knowledge
- lots of student interaction—in whole group and small-group activities
- incidental learning (lots of minilessons)
- lots of questions
- gives clues—has kids guess words
- lessons indicate lots of planning—kids never run out of things to do; activities meaningfully linked to theme, purpose, skills
- lessons include entire range of readers
- provides information in advance in order to avert errors
- tasks consistently within reach of all students; all achieve success, none held back
- individualization
- reinforces use of multiple approaches/strategies
- gets students to talk about the strategies they are using through questions, scaffolding
- patience (waits for students to get out what it is they want to say)
- positive redirection

Writing (the process)

- whole group discussion
- story webs
- talk with partners
- write/draw
- teacher provides individual feedback, monitors student progress around the room
- lots of scaffolding throughout

Written Products

- students all familiar with use of idea webs—make good use of them
- most students can write a full page
- lots of ideas, organized well (webs)
- writing of high quality
- spelling accuracy high

Student Engagement

- consistently high, regardless of activity or grouping
- teacher uses positive redirection to refocus kids who are off task
- engagement frequently 100%; rarely less than 80% to 85%

General Classroom Atmosphere

- very positive
- caring
- lots of positive feedback
- lots of individual attention
- teacher redirects behavior with positive or neutral comments, hands on shoulders

- teacher and students enthusiastic
- lots of student cooperation
- teacher consistently respectful of students
- teacher clearly likes students
- "[H3], I wish I lived here!" (from lowest reader in the class)
- kids behavior is well modulated; they respond quickly to teacher redirection

Time Management

- time well-planned
- students never without something to do
- lots of cues to help students become better managers of their own time
- lots of encouragement to plan their time, consider how much more time they need
- schedule consistent
- students never appeared to feel rushed to complete assignments

Room Arrangement

- desks in small groups
- rug area with easel
- table at back used for reading groups
- signs all around room (decoding rules, question words, writing checks)

Other Adults

- used for reading groups, reading with individual children, xeroxing, making minibooks
- adults never observed sitting and watching a lesson

Home/School Connection

- homework (usually spelling and math) encourages parent participation

- references to home received positively
- students encouraged to take books home to read with parents

Reading Levels of Students

(to be discussed at interview)

NRRC National
Reading Research
Center

318 Aderhold, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602-7125
3216 J. M. Patterson Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

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